

Dystopia

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Dystopia
Tales of the Bookbinders

Charles Eugene Anderson

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Europa Nightmare

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DYSTOPIA

There once was a time when all that was written was never read.

– From the Prayers of the third Librarian

We've all heard the old tales though I never believed any of them.

Yet here's the one fairy tale I remember the most. It was told to me when I was a child. I don't know if you'll find any truth in it, but maybe you will, and if you can find one current of legitimacy, then I'll happily be your guide through it.

Let me start at the beginning the place where all fairy tales embark.

Once upon a time, there were so many books that not all of the books could be read, so most of them remained unread. Those books lined the shelves of the many bookstores of our land. In fact, there were so many books and so many of them went unread, the bookbinders would have all of them shipped back to their warehouses where they would burn them into a fine black smoke. At that time the earth was so cold the bookbinders would warm their hands on those fires, and near those flames, they enjoyed playing games of chess against one another.

Long ago one of the bookbinders said to the other while they were playing chess, 'A horse can't move that way.'

'Up one and over one. It's the way we have always played the game,' said the other bookbinder.

'No,' said the other binder, but before he could continue he coughed because all of the black smoke from the books they'd just burn. He started again, 'No, it's up three and over one. That's how the horse moves.'

'The other binder who didn't like the man across from him said, 'At least, I know the piece not called a horse. It's called a phalanx, and that's a phalanx move.' This bookbinder wanted to cough, but he didn't because he wanted to argue instead.

As you well know, neither one of them understood the rules, but it didn't stop them from playing their game. Each day they tried to cheat each other while they played chess. Because it got colder and colder they had to burn more and more books to stay warm.

And because there was so much smoke from all the books that had been burned, it polluted and painted the sky is very black color indeed. All this smoke caused the earth to warm, and after a while, when the people had enough of the binder's smoke, they said, 'You cannot print and burn so many books because it's polluting our skies.' So instead of printing a multitude of books it was determined they only had enough environmental footprints to spare for a single book, and from that time forward, only a single book was allowed to be printed during the year.

But which book could they print and then throw into their fire? And would it be the last book they would be allowed to print and burn?

Soon there were many factions arguing with each other, and the people couldn't decide which book to print. They wanted to argue. They wanted to shoot each

other. At first, the selection was left to the politicians, but with every choice they made, there were many citizens who weren't pleased with the politician's decision. The politicians quickly learned to take their paddles out of that stream, and they came to a quick conclusion. The choice for the Last Book should be made by those who thrived, breathed, and couldn't survive without the flow of books every day. The choice was easy; the librarians would be left to make the first selection. The citizens seemed content, and they waited eagerly for the librarians' first selection.

But the bookbinders fought back, so instead of books, they started to burn everything that could hold a flame. They burned houses; they burned cars and everything that was flammable in nature. They burned so many things which blackened so much of the sky that the librarians went to their own stacks of books and began to pray. In their prayers, they began to move in their own dance, and their dance became a whirl. They whirled themselves into a dance, and it was in the mist of their whirling-destructive dance a solution came to them. The librarians would flood most the bookbinders away like Allah had done to the earth thousands of years before. They would drown out the bookbinders and wash away their fires of environmental sin. When the librarians' river began to flow, its waters quickly washed away the bookbinders and the black smoke from their fires forever.

But the people no longer had the books they wanted, so the librarians filled the river with data instead. They poured into it every fact and figure they could find, and they mixed them into the stream. Every word, every song, every picture, filled the new stream and the people of

the world seemed content. They could go to the edge of the stream and draw upon the data waters for the information whenever they needed.

And the librarians placed walls, rocks, and data blocks inside the stream, so the bookbinders couldn't evaporate it with their fires ever again. Yet the librarians still needed people who could run the whole length of the river, and they found a group who could navigate the data river, the guides. Those guides could travel the entire stream. Along with the guides were their backseat analyzers who rode the rapids behind them. The needed guides and analyzers were brought to the stream from all four corners of the world.

All were happy with the new world except for the surviving bookbinders. They were so angry they grew bat wings and turned into dark angels. The dark angels sought to disrupt the data that flowed in the river. The dark angels and guides were in a never-ending struggle, a war, and each looked to destroy the other. So a new being had to be created and the first Augur was born, and with his help, the angels had to retreat away from the river's banks.

Like I said, I used to think the story was fictional. I didn't believe that a book could ever go unread or unappreciated. I thought it wasn't true about the bookbinders and the librarians, but now I think there might be some truth to the old fairytale. So why did I change my mind? Because I have books I have never read myself. Can you imagine the luxury and the waste I've selfishly indulged in? Oh, the carbon footprints I've left behind. I'll never return them, and the librarians will never have the satisfaction of recycling my personal books that I plan on keeping only for myself.

I'm a river guide through a stream of numbers. Most who are good in my profession can feel cold data before it can be seen, and I like to think that I'm one of them. I have learned the magic of the data stream that can only be predicted by throwing a broken bone computation with my paddle's blade. Some say their predictions are good for an hour, a day, or maybe even a week before they change the current. I have even met a man who claimed a year at-tide forecast, but I knew that it can't be predicted in the main data stream, and if I'd used it, it would've made all the numbers false, and they would've flipped my craft over.

Once a prediction has become ribbed the data would have to be poured into the stream all over again from the beginning, and the water of numbers would've had an extra tributary that no guide would've wanted to run through. Those would've been a class six rapid. We have always found it better to keep the equation pure before it flowed back into the main stream and the other data had been mixed into it.

Sometimes Nestor, my analyzer, would sit at the bank of my drop point and watch the numbers scroll by. When Nestor saw there were no errors in the data, the trip was easy and safe, a real rubber ducky float, and it was then that my analyzer and I would nudge our kayak off the bank and into the stream.

There were analyzers who wanted to test new derivatives to see if the numbers could be falsified by an incorrect prediction, but that has never happened to me. It didn't stop those like my backseat analyzer from trying, Nestor Khan. He would speak positively about working on those proofs to anyone who would listen to him. There were other analyzers, who considered him a

heretic for his beliefs, and they assumed men like him would distort the data in the stream. They own game of chess against the numbers, and each analyzer would have to choose which side of the board to play, the black or the white.

When I first started as a guide, I used to wonder why the librarians would allow someone like him so close to the main flow of numbers, but I didn't work in the Office of the Librarian Sensor Interface so it would always remain a mystery to me. I had to trust those who saw data that I wasn't privileged to see for myself. I knew the brightly colored cords and twists of the Librarians broke the numbers into patterns that I couldn't even begin to imagine. Those who worked with the librarians were said to be chasing flights of currents that rode mists high up into the air and finally onto Allah.

So I tolerated the heretic, at first. I endured his breaks for his many prayers. Yet, over time I saw that the bones never broke Nestor, and his predictions were always complete and accurate. In due course, even though I didn't share his beliefs, we had become friends. I would log-stuff my green calendar with his eco-facts so I would be forced to remember the names of his wives and remember all his many children's birthdays. Sometimes, I would ask him kindly if he wanted to take a vacation with Janet and me so we could have a joint trip together in Florida. There we could all be USB themselves into an Orlando holiday. When I would ask him about it, he would always say to me, "When my prayer-stick is occupied, but not until all the unused memory has been filled in it. Only then will Allah see that I've been faithful, and my work is complete. Chance, I have to use all he has given to me because I consider myself to be very blessed."

"This one wasn't..." said Janet about the length of time it took her to read this year's book or maybe it was the quality of it. I wasn't sure, "I don't know what I was expecting, but this wasn't the book I wanted." She had held the book quietly in her lap while she read until she finished it completely, and she hadn't stopped reading until she had finished it. She would have plenty of time to read this one again if she wanted before it had to be returned to the recycle-librarian.

I had noticed Janet's new haircut, and I liked it, but it was shorter than I was used to. I couldn't honestly remember the last time she had gotten a new hairstyle. I could've asked her to get out her Social Contract ID for me if I wanted to remember what her hair looked like at the time when we first had signed our waiver agreement pledge to each other. If I would've asked her to get her SCID out for me she would've said, 'Chance, my love, just go over to the photo-frame. You're so silly sometimes.' But there was something about holding her picture in my hand, and I always liked the way her SCID fit in it when I looked at it. That is why the two of us looked forward to the Last Book; she had finished hers, and I hadn't even begun to read mine. In fact, I hadn't read last year's book either. Yet I had listened to the author's notes, and I had skimmed daily reports from the Singularity Literature Scribes, and I had gone with Janet to listen to the Book-Talk Priests to understand all of the book's deeper meanings that we laymen couldn't readily understand on our own.

I hadn't read the Last Book when it had been shipped from the distribution library. I found I like to leave it as it was when it arrived, new, and I didn't want to disturb it

in any way. I knew reading the yearly book would destroy its newness for me.

Janet had never cared if I read my book, and she knew exactly how many footprints it had cost us, and how many indulgences we would have to pay back for those two copies. She would reread hers again and again until it was time for it to go back to the recycle-librarians. They always looked pleased when they got hers back because it would be worn and frayed. But would it be the last book Janet be allowed to read?

I could tell she wasn't too happy with this selection, and she secretly hoped that next year would be better when it was time to place our household order again.

"I hope they select something different next year," she said and after she said that she pulled aside the warm comforter she had brought to the couch with her earlier that evening. Our mandatory thermostat had difficulty making adjustments because it got easily confused after Daylight Savings Time. "I am still cold," said Janet. I nodded and made a motion from the couch we were sharing together, to get up and get the universal remote so I could make a quick adjustment to the thermostat.

But she said to me, "Don't you dare...do you remember that we are saving footprints for the Day of Solstice? Do you think this will be the last book?"

"It doesn't seem to be the last. Every year there's always one more published."

"But they say it will be the last. One day it will be true."

"I suppose you're right. Everything must come to an end."

I remembered. I knew that we had one more hour of programmed light, and I still hadn't started reading my copy of the book. I didn't want to tell myself that the

book would remain by my side for a few more days, and eventually, I would move it over to the coffee table, and maybe I would move it to my safe hiding place where I kept the rest of the books in my collection. The librarians must have known that I still had them, and for whatever reason, they hadn't wanted to collect back my many overdue volumes.

But I had them. At least I had the last ten years of them, and they hadn't audited me or asked for any of them back.

I really wanted to read them all, and sometimes I wanted to be a law abiding citizen like my wife and return them when they were due, but for some reason, it gave me more satisfaction to keep them for myself and hidden.

When I came back, Janet recited a passage to me of her favorite poem from a previous edition of the book.

You and I have no meaning. The I has vanished
like a drop into a river of honey – Rumi

"You don't have to speak into it while you use it," I said to Nestor as I could see him turning the communicator to an old-fashioned setting that many of our generation still like to use. The data flow had been switched off again while he took time trying to talk to his eldest daughter, and I could see that it took him awhile to get the adjustment he wanted on the communicator. I didn't like to listen when he spoke to his family, but sometimes he does the stupidest things and he often hits the wrong control unless I'm there to help. He's a theorist and not a guide. When the two of us work together, I take the lead paddle because I'm much better at it, and we have been doing it that way for so long that we don't ask which one of us is going to direct our kayak on the river anymore.

He had finished talking with his daughter who was a

half-a-world away from us, and I waited patiently for him so we could go back to work. I was in the front of the kayak; I turned around as much as I could and held up my two fingers so he could see that we only had a few minutes before the stream in front of us would be re-channeled. He nodded to me that he understood.

I hadn't seen his daughter in three years, not since Janet and I had gone to Karachi on a rare overseas vacation splurge. I knew she had good marks and she was thinking of attending university. Nestor wanted her to attend the local one, but she wanted to go to England and attend Cambridge at the start of the next year. I could hear her voice and she was talking to her father about abandoning her current school's Indonesian Tiger Saving Team that she was the captain of. She wanted to join a different team because the other one was going to the jungle islands to do a real tiger habitat survey during the next term.

"Do you know how much that's going to cost? The carbon footprints in the airline ticket alone..." his tone was as firm as I had seen him ever get with her. Nestor didn't like to talk about his footprints when I was so close and could listen so easily to his conversation, but I knew that his account balance of footprints was always tight before each Renewal Time, and he made sure his family hung to the last few with a very tight grip before their household account was replenished. Nestor hit the wrong button and the signal had disappeared, he had lost the connection between the two of them.

Nestor got mad at himself, and he finally said, "Sorry, she knows not to call back right away, but when I get home next week, she also knows I'll give in quite easily to her wishes. I always do. She'll go to bloody Indonesia

if she wants,” said Nestor as he put his goggles back on and we got ready to take the kayak back out into the river again.

When someone beats a rug, the blows are not against the rug, but against the dust in it. -Rumi

I didn't say anything, he was right she got what she always wanted, and sometimes I wondered what it was like to have a daughter to spoil. My wife and I had not had children. The cost. The waste. The footprints. Nestor and his wife had six so far and sometimes I wondered which one of us had made the right decision. I had the long blade of the kayak's paddle in my hands, and I was ready to steer us again. I had chosen a life that was integrated and Nestor had chosen a fragmented one. The answer had been absolutely clear for Janet and me. We have no children. It was a finite future with zero outcomes for the two of us. For Nestor, his life was too complicated with all of his wife and children; he could never fathom all of the results with its many cloudy futures.

Janet and I rode the shuttle line that would eventually connect to the longer and larger rail lines of automated cars of our city's public transportation. Snow had fallen on the city, and it looked clean, white, and new. As we got closer to the downtown district, the snow became dirtier like it had been there since the beginning of time. “Do you think the sun will come out today?” asked Janet. She was sitting in one of the many vacant seats; I was standing next to her holding onto the hand rail even though I didn't need to.

“The DRTV says there will be a chance for the sunshine of twenty-three point six percent today,” said Janet who liked to quote the morning newscast to me. I never watch the DRTV because eventually, Janet tells me all the major

news stories after each connection-time with her personal broadcast reader. She had been very excited about the colonists at the South Pole who had just been killed by terrorists. Some of the colonists had been executed, and the rest had died while they had tried to fight back. The world's governments were deciding if they would fight the terrorists, and reoccupy the Amundsen-Scott station again, that had been abandoned by our government years before. While the South Pole wasn't anyone's territory, it hadn't stopped people like the free colonists from moving there and trying to start new lives for themselves.

"You should have seen all the books that were there. Real ones," she said to me. I must have had an early connect-time before they could censor it because I didn't see those books in the other rebroadcasts."

I hadn't believed her at first, but she kept insisting. "Chance, the colonists must have had thousands of books there. I've never seen so many."

The train crossed over to the Gold Shuttle Line and when it did it bumped to a stop while it waited for the other cars to attach themselves. When we crossed the flat frontier, the windows automatically turned black and they would remain so until we reached the hub's central station. While we rode the rest of the way, the artificial overhead light made us both look ill.

A heretic mother and daughter moved from the car they had been in and into ours; they must have been going to the same destination as us. The girl had a copy of this year's Last Book. I thought she was too young to read it, but I knew that some parents like to spoil their children. The mother was smartly dressed in a jacket that could've been worn on an old English Estate, and she

had dressed the girl as a Hollywood child-star, from the far-flung 1980's. Neither the mother nor the daughter was moderately dressed, and sometimes I forgot there are women who didn't cover their heads with Hijabs.

There she was with her own copy of the book, and when she sat down she ignored the rest of us and started to read hers in a world all to herself. I had my book in my pack, and I had wrapped it in a special cloth that I knew would keep it safe and undisturbed. When Janet saw the girl with the book, she waited a short time until the girl looked her way, and she said to her with a smile, "It's good...isn't it?"

The girl, who must've been nine or ten, said back to my wife with a way that only a young girl could say, "It's really wonderful."

Janet asked, "Did you read the one last year's book?"

"No," said the girl, and I could see that her mother was proud of her daughter while the girl continued to talk to my wife. "This is my first real book...And I'm going to read it over and over again until it has to go back to the librarian."

I was surprised when Janet and the girl both started to quote their same favorite passage from this year's Last Book at the same time.

'We were appraised at a very small amount. Haven't you heard my name throughout the world?' Then for the final part, they both started to shout it together. 'I'm nobody, I'm nobody, and I'm nobody.'

When they finished both of them started to laugh, and I don't think I ever had seen my wife look so young before. Janet looked up at me and smiled, and I knew she would be happy for the rest of the day.

The bomb exploded. The train was knocked off of the

electrified tracks. The car we are in flies up and goes sideways. We're knocked to the right. The car lands on the side. I stay awake. There's blood. There's broken glass. I saw Janet. She's near. I saw her hair. I want to cover it up. I want to use my hand and pull her Hijab down. My wife is a proper woman, and I don't want others to think badly about her. My arm didn't work. The mother and the daughter are dead. Their eyes show they're dead. Their eyes stare out, but they no longer see. The blood flows over my eyes, and I no longer see anything. I no longer remember.

Don't grieve. Anything you lose comes round in another form. -Rumi

Nestor had disappeared. I hadn't ridden the river with him for weeks. His link had been disengaged, and I wasn't able to contact him. I knew I had to ride the data by myself in a solo kayak if I were to find him.

Angels danced angrily in front of my eyes. I wanted to enter the stream, and I knew I should wait for it to clear. Nestor wasn't with me. I'd been left on my own. I had left many messages for him, but he wasn't plugged in. There were many currents and channels that I couldn't see because the angels had left the entire river turning and swirling.

I hadn't been on the river without Nestor Khan for a long time. I could see that the data-angels were still calling for me to follow. I knew better, and I knew that the angels like to call a solitary guide out on their own to his doom. I remembered what Nestor said to me, 'Allah is beauty; he waits for beauty.' I could no longer wait.

Angels had their own dance in the air. Analyzers had their dance when they threw the bones. Librarians had their own spinning dance. All guides knew the river

changed every day, and it was never the same river twice. A current that runs towards the left bank one day might veer towards the right the next. Maybe it was our dance. Guides danced upon the water in their kayaks, and I knew that dance is how I would find my friend. I was going to attempt the Steiner without a backseat-analyzer. The Steiner was named for the German Chess Master, Rudy Steiner. It was said that the Russians made the best violinists and the best chess players, but, the German Steiner was the exception to the rule. He was the master of both the violin and the chess board. He used to lay defensive traps where he could wait and take the queen from his opponents. Steiner's chess play had a weakness because if an opponent could wait him out, he could defeat him by moving a pawn to the back row and receive a second queen. Even a great player couldn't defend against two angry queens.

So it was the same with the Steiner in our data stream. The trick was to give the backseat analyzer enough time to make all of his calculations, and if given the proper amount of time he could throw the bones properly and find the best route through it. Heretic or not, Nestor had always done his job well, but this time he wasn't on this trip with me.

When I lifted my head up, I saw a librarian who had been watching me for some time. Like most Librarians, this one was a woman. I had been in a resting position, but when I saw her, I raised up the rest of my body. This librarian was a third level one and she wore the purple cords around her neck that showed her rank. A third level librarian was said to be focused on heaven all the time, so I was surprised that she was distracted by the concerns of someone else.

I had only seen a genuine third level librarian a few times, and I knew guides that had gone their whole careers without ever seeing these women in person. Yet, all of us guides had seen angels because they were common in our work. Angels are infuriating creatures who cause us guides unhappiness and sorrow on a daily basis. Even though angels are small, a single angel could flip over a two-man kayak with ease. I knew I had to find Nestor. I knew I would find him at the end of the Steiner. He might need my help, and I knew a guide's first duty was to rescue their backseat analyzer.

"You seek your coworker, yet the river is too dangerous without him," said the librarian to me. She held her spinning-dancing position three feet above me and the river, and I might've been able to touch her with the blade of my paddle. The librarian never looked directly at me, but she always looked someplace else, someplace far away, and somewhere far off that only she could see. "Your friend won't be there at the end of this journey."

I was disappointed, and I didn't understand, and it must have shown on my face. I hadn't thought that she was looking at me, but maybe she had been. Because the next thing she said to me, "While he may not be where you thought he was...it doesn't mean you can't help him.

"Where is he?" I asked making sure I had enough flat-water ahead of me, and I still didn't need to do anything before I reached The Steiner.

"He's someplace else. He's at the last library on earth, a great library that rivals the ancient ones."

"There's no such place. All the books have been reclaimed, digitized, and recycled. There are no books, no bookbinders anymore," I said.

"So that's what you've been told. Yes, the libraries have

been all emptied at our bidding, but there's still one. You didn't think we would recycle them all did you?" she asked. She spun closer to me. "Chance, we have even allowed you to keep your own little collection of books. The Earth will not always be like this. There'll be a time again...there'll be a need, a want for them again, please, we aren't all barbarians trying to bring down Istanbul's gate. The future must be preserved, and some of us still know that."

"The river is a prayer..." I said to myself because it was time to recite my simple Guide's prayer over and over again like I always did before my kayak went into the Steiner's mouth. I could start the prayer, but I couldn't finish it. "The river is a prayer..."

"There's no past, present, but only the future. We wait in the future for the past to come at us again," said the Librarian saying her own prayer as she started to gain altitude and to fly off leaving me alone on the river. "It's there you'll find the Augur."

"Who's the Augur?" I asked but she had left me. The angels that were waiting for me at the Steiner made an enraged attempt for me and my kayak. They glided low over the data, heading straight for me.

It wasn't until I got to the first chute of the Steiner that the first flight of angels tried to gang up on me. The first eddy of the Steiner is 'The Stinker'. It was there I had to make a tricky maneuver inside of it because I had to draw the bow of the kayak in a different direction, so I could pass around the eddy and point the bow towards the Stinker's exit.

It was there that two angels made their way towards me. I still had to make my maneuver or else the bow of the kayak would've been pulled into the Stinker, and

while it wasn't a large eddy, there was so much data going through the stream at once, I didn't want to be sucked down into it. I couldn't fight them off and paddle the kayak at the same time. The first angel clawed into my arms with the long nails of both of his fingers that were almost as sharp as a bird's talons. While he was strong enough to dig his nails into my arm, I dug my paddle into the data current harder. Finally, I was able to turn the kayak the way I wanted to go.

While the first angel distracted me, the second angel flew to the bow of the kayak and was trying to pull it into the Stinker. Between the two of them, I was able to hold my own, and I was slowly able to draw the kayak in the direction I wanted it to go. That was when a third angel came to join his brothers, but instead of attacking me, he helped the second at the front of the kayak, and the two of them were able to pull my craft into the eddy.

I tried to make a digging stroke with my paddle into the stream, I might've been able to get through The Stinker if I had had Nestor's help, but instead, my kayak was pulled into the eddy. It jerked me hard against the cockpit, and I knew I was going to get rolled into a very bad spot on this part of the river.

Before I overturned, I was able to whip the back blade of my paddle at one of the angels on the bow with my free left hand, I hit him hard with a downwards stroke, but it did nothing to save me, and I still went into The Stinker's descending pull of its data flow.

I hadn't played well against the Steiner, and I was going to lose everything because I had lost my queen too early in this game, and I was being pulled down. There would be no recharge, no second chance, and only death awaited me if I couldn't free myself.

'You can't hold your breath forever. Sooner or later you are going to swallow a big mouthful of data,' said my guide-trainer to me long ago, but first, I had to release the kayak's skirt that held me tight.

I knew if I could get back to the top, I could signal other guides who would call a rescue pickup for me. That was the best solution, but that didn't happen to me. In the eddy, I had lost my paddle as soon as I overturned, and at first, I was able to keep the darker data out of my mouth, but I couldn't find the clasp for the kayak's skirt. As long as I couldn't find it, I would remain inside its cockpit and not able to save myself.

I reached behind me where the clasp should've been, but there was something else there. It was the angel that I had knocked into the eddy earlier. He had attached himself to the stern of my craft, and when I reached back I could feel his teeth as he bit into my hand.

I knew I was going to swallow data at any second. A human could swallow a few mouthfuls at a time, but anything more was bad. I had to release the skirt, but instead of withdrawing back my hand, I was still going for the rescue clasp.

I was able to release the skirt, but instead of freeing myself, I was going to free that angel also. I wasn't a hero, but I decided our fates were going to be the same while the two of us were in the stream.

"God makes beauty, and he waits patiently for beauty," I said a guide-prayer of my own.

I still had the angel with me when the visions had left, and I pulled the angel tightly by his hair with my good hand. The creature was lost in his own dark data visions, but I didn't care. I had my wits back, and with my left hand, I was able to activate my float-bag.

The yellow bag inflated around the two of us. I had positioned the creature in a rescuer's pose. After a while, we were free of the Stinker, and I gasped as fresh air filled my lungs. My float bags internal compressors deflated the emergency raft to half its size but it still kept enough air in it to keep our heads above the river.

Blood mixed in the data and went into my mouth when we hit the next rapids. They were 'The Juniors', they weren't big rapids if I was in my kayak, but when I only my head sticking above the water and trying to hold onto the angel, they seemed huge to me from that low vantage in the data-water.

I must've gotten more of the river's raw data and the angel's blood in my mouth when I had to come to the surface again to breathe. The juniors might've been smaller, but they were big enough for me to take in what my body couldn't handle. I couldn't help but drink more of the data.

I could see the angel, and I still held him. I knew if I didn't rescue him he wouldn't survive the next set of rapids. I still had life and decided to save the angel. I grasped him tighter in my arms and took his head out of the data.

I instinctively swam away from the current and tried for the shore. There was a nest of angels, and I was surprised to see them living so close to the stream. I deposited the wounded angel amongst his flock. They ignored me and rose to attend to their wounded brother.

I sat on the shore and didn't have the strength to move, and in its middle sat an angel in the flock that looked familiar. This angel looked so old and frail to me, and when I looked at him, he looked up at me. It was when I saw a face that I had seen many times before. It was

the same as my friend, Nestor's face, but this one was an angel, and his face was more careworn than the younger man I thought I knew.

I sat there for a few minutes, and he hadn't said anything to me. When he finally spoke, he started slowly to stand, "Do you not see that Allah is he, whom we do glorify? All of those who are in the heavens and earth are glorified when the angels extend their wings? He knows the prayers of each one, and it is exaltation to him."

When I finally spoke, I said, "Are you, my lost friend?" Then Nestor said, "At a young age I was happy at the sight of my friends.

Now listen to my end and see what happens. I came in like a cloud, and I left like the wind."

"I don't understand," I said.

"The past and the future are all the same, the younger man hasn't yet met the man he'll become," he said looking at me with eyes that were too cloudy to see his brown pupils.

"He'll become you?" I asked. "But you were lost and I was trying to find you."

After we had spoken some more, he said to me, "It's time for you to leave. Go further downstream. There's an island you need to see, and a man you need to speak with."

Sometime in his life, I knew my friend, Nestor, would be transformed into an angel. He would no longer be the man who was married to three different women, but instead, he would be reborn into a different creature, an angel. Once the angels had been my enemies, but then I wasn't so sure. The myths said the bookbinders had been transformed into angels. I wasn't a bookbinder's friend. I

had been their foe, yet I had a friend who'd become one of them.

I could no longer rely on the kayak, but the perils of the stream below no longer mattered to me. I would ride the rest of the way without any difficulties and without a kayak.

I floated on the river further than I had ever been in my kayak, and I followed the data until the stream widened so far I couldn't see the river banks.

In the flow of the data stream, sat a very small island, I had never seen it before, and I was surprised. As I floated closer I could see that there was a pavilion on its grounds. It looked like it had been built by the ancients. A man stood in its middle, and I could see librarians doing their twirling dance around him.

"Are you a librarian?" I asked as I pulled myself from the stream and into full view of the man.

"I'm the first librarian; I'll be the last librarian. Sometimes I'm the Augur," he said to me.

I looked and he stood in the middle of a group of lesser librarians who danced around their master. They wore white tunics while he was black. The librarians were in their spinning dance, and as they twirled around their master they pointed one hand towards heaven and their other hand pointed towards the earth.

"Would you like to join the dance? You have drunk from the river. You should," he said. "You've survived angels, the data, and the rapids. You've earned the right to dance."

I started to spin with the rest of the librarians around their master, and at first, I could only imitate the others, but after a while, I was lost in the movement.

Everything in the stream came his way while I saw him

standing in the middle of his pavilion. Every few minutes a librarian would appear, and do a spinning dance near him, and then disappear. He motioned for me to come near him, and he was unlike the older Nestor, the angel. This man was young and active; he was aware of everything around him.

He wanted to see it all, and I was no more a distraction to him than anything else that was there. The librarians fed him information constantly, all of his wants and desires, and nothing was denied him by his servants and their swirling dance.

But I found my nerve, and I spoke, stopping my own dance, "Where is my friend, but the Nestor who lives now?"

"You speak during the dance. You're the guide who can stop us. Stop his dance and ours. None of the librarians can do what you have done. It must have been the angel's blood mixed into the data you have drunk." Then another librarian danced to him and he said to all who were around him, "In this world, I'm the hidden treasure. I'm the owner of the land of eternal life. Since I have passed through the hardships of this world, I have become the water of life."

"That isn't true," I said, and the two librarians came over to me, and helped me restart my dance. At first, I was unsure of myself, but after a time I became liberated in the dance, and I soon felt the release he talked about. I would be free if I let him make all the choices, and I was as happy as I could've been because all I had to do was continue with the dance because nothing else mattered.

After a while, the Augur noticed me again while I danced, and he asked me a question I wasn't expecting, "Why didn't you ask me about your books?" The dance

of the librarians didn't stop, but I did for a short time when he said that. "The ones you have been hiding. I have already sent librarians to your house and they will retrieve your wasteful collection."

I said nothing because I didn't care about those books anymore, and I only cared about the slow spinning dance with the librarians I performed while I was in his presence.

"Did you know what book the English produced first? For them it started over there...there at Westminster, in London," he said pointing to someplace that only he could see, but when I looked, I could also see the bookbinder's shops set up under an old cathedral. "The bookbinders have been with us for a long time and yet you don't know the book they published? No, I suppose not, and then I'll tell you."

"The Bible," I said before he spoke, and as I spoke, I made the choice of stopping the dance around the Augur. This time he didn't seem to care.

He continued his story about the binders, "No, not the English. They were interested in other things. Their first book? It was about chess...it's here in the stream but no one reads it...no one pulls the information from the data. But I have, and in it...it uses chess as an analogy for life. You have castled your king, Chance. With those books, you've hidden, and you were hoping I wouldn't find out about them." "How could you've known?" I asked but soon was distracted. I was slowly returning to the man I had once been.

"Tsk, tsks, did you think we didn't know about your books and your own little game of chess you were playing against us?"

"I wasn't ashamed because I no longer cared about

them. I cared about my wife though and the shame I had brought her, but the books. I didn't care about them anymore."

"Your friend, he went to the bottom of the world. They went all the way to the South Pole to escape me, but they couldn't. No, not even there...there's your friend and he is there in my business. No, no one shall be wasteful not even there. Nothing is out of reach of my data stream."

The image faded away from that of my wife to the pole, and there at the Amundsen-Scott station. I could see the geodesic dome that overwhelmed all of my view's attention. The scan changed, and I could see Nestor, he was standing in one of the buildings, and he was dressed in clothes that would protect the man from the very frigid climate of Antarctica. I breathed a sigh of relief knowing he was okay. He was inside one of the buildings there, and I could see all the books that the colonizers must have brought with them to that place...there must have been thousands of books, and they all gleamed in front of my eyes like rare gems.

I could see the Nestor I remembered. He was wearing cold weather gear, goggles on his head, his hood was pulled back, and a coat that made my analyzer seemed much bigger than he was. Even though he was inside the station, he still wore the jacket that protected him against the cold. "Chance, is that you...what has happened?" he asked looking at me. "You've been transformed into a different creature; you now know your skills, you're a much deadlier piece on the game board.

"Good, you're there, bring back those books to me," said the Actuary to Nestor.

Nestor said to us, "But instead I think I'll stay here. Someone must protect these books. The librarians

cannot have all the fun. I will protect them. Dawn does not come twice to wake a man, and I fear if I give them to you I will never wake again."

"A binder, the bookbinders are reborn," said the Augur with a look of disappointment. "You cannot protect them forever."

"I think, I can," said Nestor, "As you must realize it's not too cold for me, yet it's too frozen for you. It's too icy for your river to flow here in this place. You're a chess player, and yet you don't already see that I have you in checkmate."

And it was then that I realized what had happened. Nestor had played a pawn, and there he had exchanged it for the power of the queen on the Augur's chessboard. He had moved himself to the back-row of his opponent's board and there he would be able to attack in any direction. Nestor had declared victory against the Augur.

"What about your family?" I asked.

"Most of them are here already, or on their way...I have thought of everything," he said to me as if it was almost too distasteful to continue the conversation. "Chance, I must go and sever the connection. Goodbye, for now, my friend." Nestor had become a keeper of books, maybe even a bookbinder, but I knew at some other time in his life he would be transformed into an angel, but that's another story.

The Augur looked at me and said, "So the cycle is complete and a new one has begun." Then he changed his tone and said to me, "Once upon a time, there will be a time, when new books will be written, and those books will spread like new seeds upon the wind."

I said back to him, "Once upon a time, there was a river guide who was right in the middle of his own life, in

the middle of his own tale, and life gave him a new path through the rapids." It was then I knew I was a free man. I wanted to leave the island. I would go home to my wife, and I would whisper to her a poem that I'd remembered from a previous edition.

It was time for me to leave the river and go back to the real world. I knew I wanted to get back to Janet, and when I got home, I would decide if we'd follow Nestor to that faraway place. I knew there were many currents in the river to choose here, but those would have to wait. I needed to get back to my wife.

If anyone asks how do the clouds unveil the moon? I'll untie the front of her rope and say, 'Like this.'

If anyone asks how Jesus raised the dead? I will kiss her on the lips and say, 'Like this.'

If anyone asks how God's pure embrace reached? I will take her and say, 'Like this.' – Rumi

Let the injunctions of God descend upon us like drops of frozen rain.

– From the prayers of the Third Librarian

I'm in the present. I wake up, and I'm not where I thought I was going to be. When I'd been here I had been next to Janet. The train. The Bomb. The dead mother and daughter.

I'm not inside the train, but I'm next to it. The revolutionaries of the bookbinders are wearing gas masks. I can't see their faces. There are no emotions. They're shooting those of us on the train. One by one the bullets are shot and they killing us off. I turn my head to see Janet. My wife is alive. She pulling my arm.

"Wake up, Chance. Can you get on your feet?"

I don't say anything. I can barely hear her. My ears are ringing.

"Let's go," she said pulling on my arm. "Get up."

I stand. I follow her. We leave the train behind. We leave the killing behind. I don't feel good. I want to rest, but I can't. I keep focused on Janet. I trust her, and she'll find someplace safe.

We're blocked. It's terrorist. I can't see his face. I can see his gun. I push Janet. We tumble away. Rocks, cement, and bushes hide us. I can hear Janet. She's breathing hard, but she's not speaking.

I can also hear the terrorist speaking to someone I can't see, "They're down there someplace. Should I go down there?"

"No time. We gotta leave. The shuttle line guards will be here soon."

The first terrorist yells down the hill at us, "You're lucky. We're leaving now, but know you're lucky. Next time..."

Janet is crying. We're still alive.

Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it. -Rumi

The two bookbinders faced each other across the chess board. They had started a new game and the pieces were mostly in the right spots on the board. Before the first Bookbinder said the other, 'Black moves first. You need to let me first this time because you moved first the last time.'

The other bookbinder thought about and thought the request was reasonable, "You should start first. Move one of your pieces, please."

The game between the two bookbinders would start the game, they would play and finished it. The two of them did it every day. Once the game was over, they

would look for books to bind. They hadn't found any in a long time, but it didn't stop them from looking.

While they were playing, the first bookbinder looked up. He said to the other, "There's another bookbinder out there."

"Does he see us?"

"No, but I see him. It's cold where he's at. Soon he'll want to burn books to keep warm."

The second binder said, "I don't care. He'll have to wait for his turn to play in our game."

"I agree," said the first bookbinder who look back at his game, and thought about the next move he would make on the chess board. The librarians had defeated them many times, but bookbinders were getting better with every game.

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